

STATEMENT FROM GWENDA M. LOKEN LOPEZ
UPON RELEASE FROM ARGENTINE PRISON

NO DATE

10/76

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Spending five months in Argentine prisons is a de-humanizing experience. This coupled with my infrequent use of the English language for the past four years, and the fact that I was released less than 48 hours ago, makes it difficult for me to express myself at this time. Nonetheless, I feel compelled to do the best I can as a way of publicizing the plight of friends left behind in prison, and to respond to the many telephone calls received by my parents these past two days from members of the News Media asking that I relate my recent experiences. Thus, I have chosen to write and distribute this summary and will subsequently try within the limits of time, to answer any questions that you might wish to ask. I also want to express my gratitude to the many people who worked very hard for my release. Many of them are unknown to me at this time; others such as members of the U.S. Consulate Staff and the State Department interceded actively. I am now aware that Senator Hubert Humphrey and his staff labored unceasingly and were aided by Congressmen Donald Fraser and Albert Quie.

I was arrested on April 30th, 1976, for political activities very similar to those which are a part of the every day scene in the United States - particularly during an election year. With the advent of the present military coup, the activities of all political parties were declared illegal and therefore labelled by the government as subversive. The distribution of literature criticizing the military dictatorship and demanding the freedom of Isabelle Peron and others who were imprisoned, was therefore illegal and said to be

ARGENTINA PROJECT (S200000044)

U.S. DEPT. OF STATE, A/RPS/IPS

Margaret P. Grafeld, Director

☒ Release () Excise () Deny

Exemption(s): _____

Declassify: () In Part () In Full

() Classify as () Extend as () Downgrade to

Date _____ Declassify on _____ Reason _____

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subversive. The literature that I distributed did not support the ERP, as was implied in some news releases. This party is involved in terrorist activities. . . . This false accusation can only be understood as an attempt by the military police as a justification for their many arrests of innocent people in Argentina today. I have had absolutely nothing to do with the ERP organization or any other like it. Quite the contrary, I have constantly criticized their terrorist activities. I was also displeased to learn that at least one news account stated that I was a member of a left wing organization here in the United States prior to my going to Argentina. This implied that I had subversive interests before going to Argentina and this is totally false inasmuch as my reasons for going there were purely sentimental. In actual fact, my only anti-U.S. Government activity was to march in protest of the Vietnam war.

The following is a bit of background information. I was born on July 13, 1951 in Philadelphia, Pa. where my father was on active duty with the U.S. Navy. About one year later my family moved to Minneapolis where my parents have continued to live. I attended Kenwood Elementary, Jefferson Junior High and West High School. This was followed by a year as an AFS student in South Africa. Upon return I attended Augsburg College and the University of Minnesota. I met Horacio Lopez of Rosario, Argentina at an international AFS meeting in New Jersey in 1971. The following year I journeyed to Rosario, married Mr. Lopez who sometime later earned his law degree. My husband and I visited here in Minneapolis on two occasions. Life in Argentina has been made

particularly difficult the past two years because of the tremendous rise in the cost of living, the political unrest, kidnappings, murders and the like. Everyone in Argentina has been touched in one way or another by these problems.

Specifically regarding my case, I was arrested after depositing several of the previously referred to pamphlets on a public bench and boarding a bus to go home. I was arrested on the bus, brutally pulled from it by the hairs on my head, and taken to the police station. After a short interrogation, I was struck repeatedly, blindfolded, gagged and tortured physically and psychologically. I was denied the right to be visited by a member of the U.S. Embassy for more than a week after my arrest, and at no time was I allowed to speak with legal counsel, including a public defender, who was ultimately assigned to my case. I would like to emphasize at this point that torture is being utilized constantly in Argentina and has reached unbelievably brutal levels. It is known that "torture houses" are used where arrested individuals are taken and submitted to torture during prolonged periods of time before being taken to the prisons. Many have disappeared completely.

During 4 months of my imprisonment I was confined to a military jail in Rosario. The quarters were crowded with as many as 38 women in the same room that I occupied. There were only 12 beds for our use. During the 4 months the only visits that I had were from the U.S. Consulate at 3 week intervals and this was only accomplished by special dispensation. The majority of the other women had no visitors and no other contact with the outside world.

Productive activities such as knitting, crafts, etc. were not permitted. Likewise, all forms of recreation were prohibited. The quarters were below ground so that the ventilation and light were very poor. This was particularly distressing because at no time were we permitted to be out-of-doors. Medical attention was almost non-existent. The food did not provide a well balanced diet. Under these circumstances, it is impossible to maintain a sound body and mind. Fortunately for me, I was removed from this horrible situation but there are many, many others who must continue to exist under these circumstances for yet undetermined periods of time.